1:Vaillant A-5 (1928-1936)1941 NU7 Aztec NU7

fully worked utensils and tools and well-tended and productive fields, while an unsuccessful man had a small and miserable equipment. Yet except for the intervention of natural disaster the differential was largely due to the ability of a man and his household to produce with their own hands the symbols of his wealth or to exchange his specialized product for equivalent superior equipment made by others. The entrepreneur and broker had small place in the undertaking of production and its distribution.[3]

The gods also stimulated good craftsmanship. Every home had an altar, and every act was accomplished through the favor of some deity. Ceremonies to appease these custodians of natural force were of frequent occurrence. Thus the use of symbols, referring to the god whose favor was sought, came to exercise an important influence on design. Since a man does reverence with his most esteemed social attitudes and his best material possessions, each household must try to surpass its previous efforts to honor the gods. The temple equipment, therefore, tended to represent the cream of local craftsmanship.

Work in stone, the most durable natural substance available, is a common gauge of human ability. Since the tools last forever, it is possible to compare the technical abilities of peoples over an enormous span of human history. However, for basic equipment like projectile points, axes, grinding stones, and the like, satisfactory forms are reached fairly early and do not change in proportion to cultural advances in other directions. Thus the arrow or the dart points of Aztec times were not technically better than those used by the Middle Culture peoples. However, the technical demands of the sacrificial cult called for a heavy broad-bladed flint

1:Vaillant A-5 (1928-1936)1941 NU7 Aztec NU7

economic, social and religious stimulation of their sudden rise to power as a license to convert craftsmanship into great religious art.

The Aztecs did not create their art forms or their religion, which seems to have seeped in from the Mixteca-Puebla country. There the religious manuscripts and the ritualistic concepts hewn in stone and painted on vases were more complex and better drawn than their Aztec equivalents. Unfortunately, as yet, archaeological investigation has not extended to more than a sampling of this potentially rich area of Mexican civilization. However, the Valley people, given the opportunity, eagerly accepted these forms and created their own versions of the parent art.[14] (See Plates 57, top; 58, 59.)

The same elements portrayed in stone monuments appeared in smaller objects. Wooden drums and *atl-atls* had relief carvings the equal of the temple ornaments in all except scale. The same divinities were graven in bone against a background of turquoise mosaic. The goldworkers reproduced in miniature the images of the gods and goddesses and the symbols of their cult, carrying out in costume ornament the elements of the ritual in which they were used. Lapidaries succeeded in reducing jade, obsidian, rock crystal, opal, moonstone and amethyst into tiny sculptures which carry the same emotional authority as the grand-scale art. The bulk of first-rate material is enormous. It would seem that the products of tribal craftsmanship had been raised en masse into arts. Virtually overnight a cluster of primitive villages had transformed themselves into great creative centers.[15] (See Plates 45–48; 55, bottom left.)

Painting and drawing did not reflect this transmutation.

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CHAPTER X

RELIGION

A brief survey of the Aztec universe and the unpronounceable gods and goddesses who presided over it and ruled men's fate

AZTEC RELIGION, in purpose and practice, tried to attract those natural forces which are favorable to human existence and repulse those which are harmful. Ethical control and spiritual perfection fell within the province of social custom, so that the moral goals of our own religion were largely absent; the Aztec religion had no Savior of mankind, no heaven or hell to reward or punish the consequence of human behavior.[1]

The Aztecs and their forebears believed that the forces of nature acted for good or evil very much as does mankind, so that it was logical for them to personalize the elements as gods or goddesses. The process of worship entailed offering presents, uttering prayers and performing symbolic acts to induce the divine powers to operate for the public benefit. The tribal intellect was mobilized, as it were, to sort out the processes of nature, find out how they acted and devise magical procedures or rituals to win them to action favorable to man.

Nature operates in series of recurrences which give the effect of rhythms. Birth, maturity and death follow relent-

1:Vaillant A-5 (1928-1936)1941 NU7 Aztec NU7

771 lessly in human life; night succeeds day; the stations of the year rotate endlessly through spring, summer, fall and winter; the planets move in eternal sequence through the sky. Thus to discover what those rhythms were and follow their complicated but regular beat would, in Aztec philosophy, ensure the happy survival of the community. There was little thought of the perfection of the individual when vast powers hovered close, ready to destroy the whole tribe if it ceased its vigilant watch on nature. Thus rhythm and form become an essential part of worship and found their outlet in ritual and religion, art, philosophy and science.

The growth of civilization, with the resultant ramification of social function and material equipment, led likewise to a more complex perception of the universe, expressed in the stratification of gods and goddesses and a specialization of their functions. This result led to a more intense observance of ritual, which consumed a great part of the material and intellectual product of the tribe.

Aztec religion was an outgrowth of the recognition and fear of natural forces and the attempt to constrain them. The process by which man defines these forces and grades them in order of importance is as much a part of the evolution of culture as art, mechanics or social organization. The Aztecs developed a conception of the relationship of the supernatural forces to the universe that, given the precision of our method of thought, could have been developed into an imposing philosophy.

773 According to Aztec belief, the world passed through four
776 or five ages, or Suns. Details differ, but the record on the great Calendar Stone may be taken as the official version in Tenochtitlan. The first era, Four Ocelot, had Tezcatlipoca

1:Vaillant A-5 (1928-1936)1941 NU7 Aztec NU7

They had to overcome several hazards before they could take up their life there, so they were equipped with charms and gifts for the journey, which took the sacred number of four days. The wayfarer had to travel between two mountains which threatened to crush him, avoid first a snake and then a monstrous alligator, cross eight deserts, surmount eight hills and endure a freezing wind which hurled stones and obsidian knives upon him. Then he reached a broad river which he crossed on the back of a little red dog, sometimes included in the grave furniture for the purpose. Finally arriving at his destination, the traveler offered gifts to the Lord of the Dead, who assigned him to one of nine different regions. Some versions make the dead spend a probationary period of four years in the nine hells before they take up their life in Mictlan, which was, like the Greek Hades, devoid of moral significance.*

The Aztecs, as we have said, conceived of their universe as extending horizontally outward and vertically upward and downward. The world, as horizontally divided, implied the association of divine powers with the phenomena of geography and climate. This significance of direction is a familiar religious concept. The vertical arrangement of the heavens had rather more to do with rank and order than with a realization of natural phenomena. The hierarchy of the Christian saints, with its implicit recognition of position and authority, approaches closely to the point of view with which the Aztec peoples regarded their gods. Aztec and ritualized Christian worship have much the same attitude toward distinctions between philosophy and practice, and between the point of view of the instructed theologian and the humble worshipers.

1:Vaillant A-5 (1928-1936)1941 NU7 Aztec/NU7

war or sacrifice, childbirth or drowning, passed upon death to their domain. (See Plate 55, bottom left.)

This incomplete description of the gods and goddesses who thronged the Aztec pantheon gives an idea of their variety of purpose and character, outlined more fully in Table X. For an individual to try to do honor to so many gods could result in an insupportable situation. Yet even the modern Navajos pass a third of their time in ceremonial activity, and they do not have half the economic wealth of the Aztec peoples. While the ancient Mexicans extended their ceremonialism to greater lengths than do the most ritualized Christian sects, yet the relationship between the Aztecs and their gods and the Christians and their saints is not so very dissimilar, different as are the ultimate concepts of the two religions.

The priests gave guidance and prescribed the ceremonies, and the worshipers gave heed to those especial divinities upon whose patronage their life directly depended, much as a devout Catholic selects certain saints for veneration above the list of those whose days are recorded on the calendar. In the same way the Aztec tribal god has his counterpart in the patron saint of country, town or craft. The Aztec, however, thought of his gods as having strong material powers, but their spiritual aspect counted little with him.

The ritual of Aztec religion was as complex as the theology. The organization of the priesthood followed the pyramided structure of the social order, but the ceremonies were worked out in accordance with the ritualistic requirements of the calendar and the seasons. In the following chapter we shall describe the priesthood, the ceremonies and also the Aztec methods of counting, recording and using time.

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CHAPTER XI

RITUAL

In which are Summarized the Nature of the Religious Organization, the Feasts, and the Relationship between Ritual, Calendar and Writing

RELIGION was a general group activity necessary for the social and economic safekeeping of the tribe, and the priesthood was a highly important force in the direction of the communal life. In the early simple societies there were two executive chiefs, one for war and one for religious affairs. We do not know whether the priesthood comprised laymen who performed the ritual acts of specific ceremonies or whether it was an established group whose whole life was devoted to religious ends. It is probable that selected individuals originally carried out the religious duties of the tribe in addition to their civil obligations, but as Aztec culture became more elaborate, the complexity of their functions molded them into a body of permanent officials.[1]

In Tenochtitlan the Chief of Men and the Snake Woman had double duties in respect to civil and religious affairs, the former actively leading the services and the latter supervising the temples, the form of the rites and the internal affairs of the priesthood. Two high priests directed cult activities in honor of the War God, Huitzilopochtli, and the Rain God, Tlaloc, the chief divinities worshiped in this city. They

16:Bandelier E-4 (no date)1880 NU7 Aztec NU7

nite, owing, in part, to the treasure-seeking propensities of the Spanish immigrants as well as to the diligence of the clergy in obliterating all objects to which the aborigines attached superstitious notions.

For the same reason we refrain here from entering into a detailed account of the customs of worship. Still we feel obliged to state that the feature of "separate religious rites"[113] so characteristic of society based upon kin, is plainly visible among the ancient Mexicans. There are some very remarkable evidences of this, to which we must allude.

It has already been established at the outset, that each calpulli had "its particular god," which was worshipped, as a tutelar deity, within the territory of that calpulli. Consequently each kin had its particular medicine-lodge or temple.[114] Besides, the last one of the seventy-eight places into which Father Sahagun subdivides the great central "teo-calli" of the tribe, is described by him as follows:

"The seventy-eighth edifice was named *calpulli*, these were small buildings enclosing the inside of the square, these little houses they called *calpulli*, and there the principals and officials of the republic gathered, to do penance for four days preceding each festival occurring at twenty days interval. Their vigils thus lasted four days, during which time some of them ate at midnight and others at noon."[115]

This statement, which is confirmed (according to the learned Jesuit John Eusebius Nieremberg)[116] by the celebrated physician and naturalist Francisco Hernandez, is followed by another one, not less important, also of Sahagun:

"They offered up many things in the houses which they called "calpulli," which were like churches of the quarters, where those of the same gathered, as well for to sacrifice, as for other ceremonies they were wont to perform."[117]

Thus the right of the kin to "separate worship" appears not

[113] "*Ancient Society*" (p. 71).

[114] Besides the positive assertions of *Sahagun* (Lib. II, Appendix, p. 211. Lib. I, cap. XIX, p. 31): "se poulan en una de las casas de oracion que tenian en los barrios que ellos llamaban calpulli, que quiere decir iglesia del barrio ó parroquia" and (Lib. II, cap. XXXVII, etc.), we have also the testimony of *Durán* (Cap. V, pp. 42 and 43, and Cap. IX, pp. 79 and 80), and *Oviedo* (Lib. XXXIII, cap. X, p. 302).

[115] "*Historia general*," (Lib. II, Appendix, p. 211).

[116] "*Historia naturæ*," (Lib. VIII, cap. XXII, p. 146).

[117] "*Historia general*," (Lib. II, Appendix, p. 211. See note 114).